

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

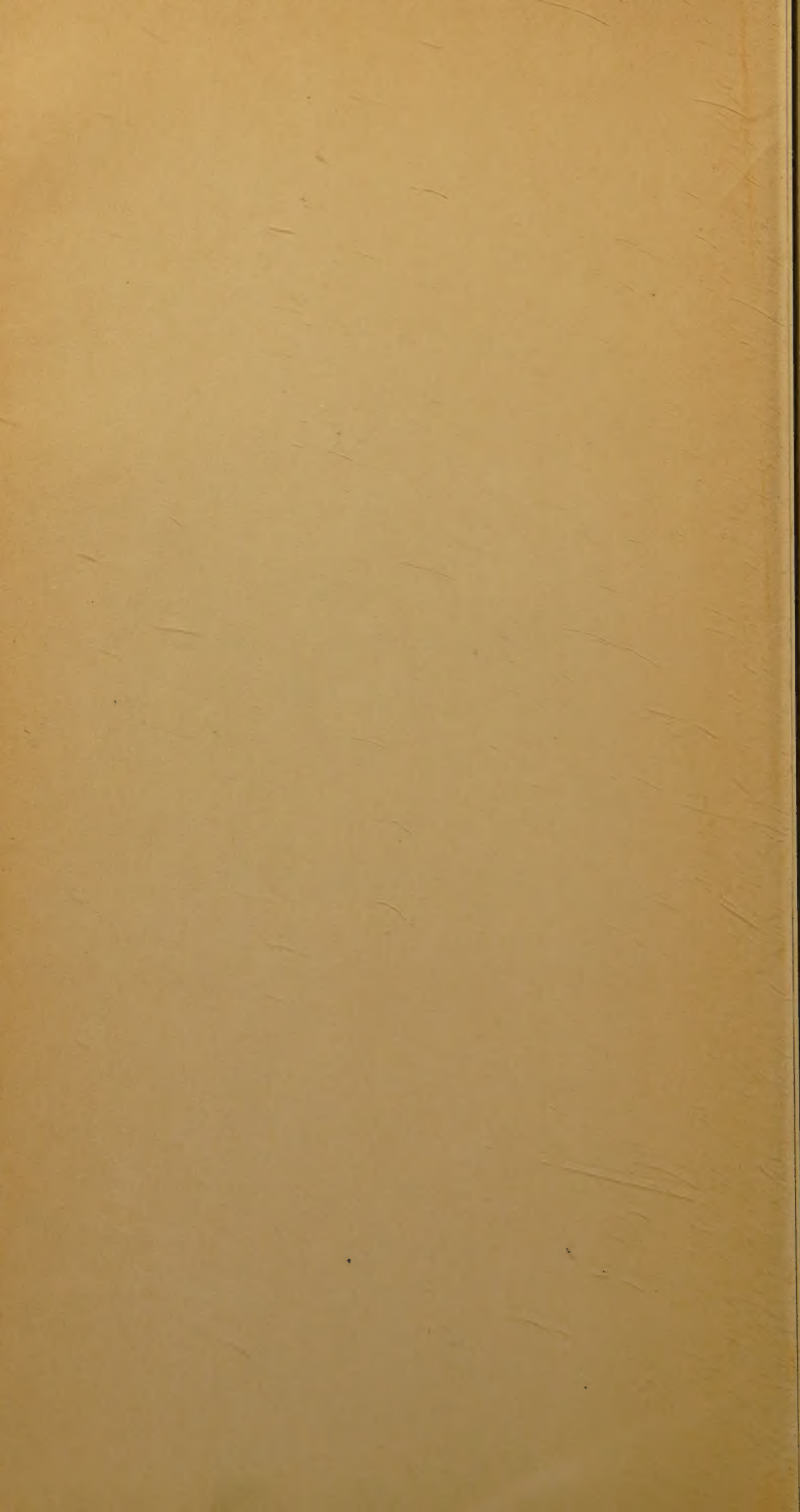
BY

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

譯自中文

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TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Fiction

PARNASSUS ON WHEELS
THE HAUNTED BOOKSHOP
KATHLEEN
TALES FROM A ROLLTOP DESK
WHERE THE BLUE BEGINS
PLEASED TO MEET YOU
PANDORA LIFTS THE LID
(with Don Marquis)
THE ARROW
THUNDER ON THE LEFT

Essays

SHANDYGAFF
MINCE PIE
PIPEFULS
PLUM PUDDING
TRAVELS IN PHILADELPHIA
THE POWDER OF SYMPATHY
INWARD HO!
RELIGIO JOURNALISTICI
THE ROMANY STAIN

Poetry

SONGS FOR A LITTLE HOUSE
THE ROCKING HORSE
HIDE AND SEEK
CHIMNEYSMOKE
PARSONS' PLEASURE

Plays

ONE ACT PLAYS



PORTRAIT OF THE OLD MANDARIN

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

By
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Illustrated by
GLUYAS WILLIAMS



. . . Browning told a good story about himself and a Chinese ambassador in London who was one of the best poets in the Empire. Browning asked him what sort of poems he had chiefly written. He answered: "My poems are mostly enigmatical." "Then," said Browning, "we are brothers."

—*Diary of John Addington Symonds*



GARDEN CITY : NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
1927

Main Translations from the
PS Chinese
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1927

tions and a few schol-
Rocking Horse (1919),
(1922), and *Parsons'*

Pleasure (1923).

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DEDICATED TO
AN ANGLO-AMERICAN MANDARIN
IN WHOSE HEART ARE MANY
CELESTIAL INSCRIPTIONS
LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH



THE PALIMPSEST

There is, in each man's heart,
Chinese writing—
A secret script, a cryptic language:
The strange ideographs of the spirit,
Scribbled over or half erased
By the swift stenography of daily life.

No man can easily decipher this cordiscript,
This blurred text corrupted by fears and follies;
But now and then,
Reading his own heart
(So little studied, such fine reading matter!)
He sees fragments of rubric shine through—
Old words of truth and trouble
Illuminated, red and gold.
The study of this hidden language
Is what I call
Translating from the Chinese.



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THE OLD MANDARIN



TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

INSCRIPTION FOR A BUTTERFLY'S WING

There are two Languages:
One is of Great Mandarins and Important Affairs,
It is civil, precise, and meaningless.
The other,
The Speech of the Spirit,
So rarely spoken, so dimly understood,
Is haltingly whispered
By lonely men.
In the first I am glib,
In the latter I stammer;
But I know which will serve me
In the Foreign Land.

A TIME OF CRISIS

On a thin blue morning
Of the Month of Officials
Came Noh Kale, the income tax collector.
I laid down my roll of Confucius
And said, "Friend,
My treasure is at your disposal;
Let us audit it together—
Thirteen unfinished poems,
A letter from an editor
Saying that a check will be here shortly;
My ivory chopsticks,
And this view, from my tea house,
Of the girls bathing on the other side of the river."
But still the obstinate agent
Persisted peevishly
And with the reiteration of a primitive mind cried
loudly:
"Quarterly instalment still due,
1700 taels."

THE OLD MANDARIN

INSCRIPTION FOR A MAN-HOLE
IN BROOKLYN

Sometimes, —
In spinning over the leaves of a book,
The eye catches a glamorous phrase
That a methodical search through the volume
Fails to rediscover.
Even so, every day,
There are moments of shining astonishment
That my sober retrospection
Can never define.

“THE SUN’S OVER THE FOREYARD”

When I was a passenger in the barque *Windrush*
I became aware of a pleasant sea custom.
Along toward noon
The captain’s boy used to come politely to me
And whisper
“The captain’s compliments, and the sun’s over the
foreyard.”
And presently I learned that this meant
Come aft to the poop
And have a drink.
For mariners, men of sound self-control,
Never touch the bottle
Until the sun reaches the yards.

Now that I myself am a seaman
I always ship in square sail,
Never in steam.
In a steamer
The yards are so much higher.

THE OLD MANDARIN

THE OLD MANDARIN ON HIS TRAVELS

When I visited America
I saw two things that struck me as extraordinary:
People packed in the subway
Rocking uneasily on their hams
Endlessly studying the newspapers;
And people packed in the movies
Endlessly staring at the films.
I said to myself
If the American people ever develop Minds
There are two great industries
That will crash.

AN AMERICAN MYSTIC

But you do not understand the subway,
Said an American mystic
Sitting next me at the Rotary Club.
It is a travelling hermitage,
A flying monastery,
A nunnery that moves at fifty miles an hour.
Into its roaring wagons
Thoughtful men and women descend with joy:
They know that there,
The only place in the whole city,
They can meditate undisturbed.



THE OLD MANDARIN ON HIS TRAVELS



HE LIKES TO GIVE BOTH
SIDES OF THE MATTER

And as for the newspapers
(Said another)
You forget that they are the last friend
Many a poor devil has.
Go down to Battery Park
And see the chaps lying on the grass.
Newspapers are their blankets,
Their pillows, their sunshades;
Newspapers their Bibles.
After everything else has gone
A poor bum will cling to his newspaper
As his last link with life.

HE PASSES ON THE GOOD WORD

The Americans, I said,
Are the kindest people in the world,
The most excitable,
The most juvenile.
The men are unaware of philosophy,
The women are unaware they are unaware of philosophy,
But the young girls . . .
And while I was talking
I heard with annoyance
My grand-nephew whispering,
"I must visit America.
I never heard the old statesman so eloquent."

THE OLD MANDARIN

THE OLD MANDARIN GRIEVES

When I was in New York
I studied the faces of the people reading newspapers
In the subway,
And I saw that the papers most read
Were sensational, sordid, salacious.
And in my mind I composed a little message
To the editors of those papers.
"Your readers needed plain, nourishing truth" (I said)
"And you gave them this scented compost,
Spiced and sugared with vanilla and civet.
They asked for bread
And you gave them
A chocolate éclair."

VERY FEW REMEMBER

As I went down from Trenton
By a strip of canal sword-blade blue in the dusk,
I suddenly remembered
That this was the way to Camp Dix
And I remembered
Troop trains travelling in the night.



THE OLD MANDARIN GRIEVES



A LETTER TO HIS FRIEND MU KOW

The Americans are wrongly supposed to be
Deficient in delicate sentiment.

For when I was in New York

I went to the Polo Grounds

To see what they call the World's Series.

One has to watch baseball every instant,

Or you miss something.

For while I was foolishly admiring

The gold frontier of sunlight receding on the turf

There was a loud cry,

A whirl of dust and limbs,

And I feared some tragic accident.

But when I asked what was amiss

The man next me, with tears in his eyes,

Said that one of the players

Had stolen home.

And I thought to myself

How charmingly touching:

Here, amid all the uproar and excitement,

This fine fellow could not resist the call of his loved ones

And sacrificed his enjoyment just to greet his wife and
bairns.

There can be no question about it,

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

For the next morning I read an account of the game
Written by Irvin Cobb, one of their Great Mandarins,
And he wrote:

“McNally, afflicted with acute nostalgia,
Stole home.”

HE COMFORTS HIMSELF

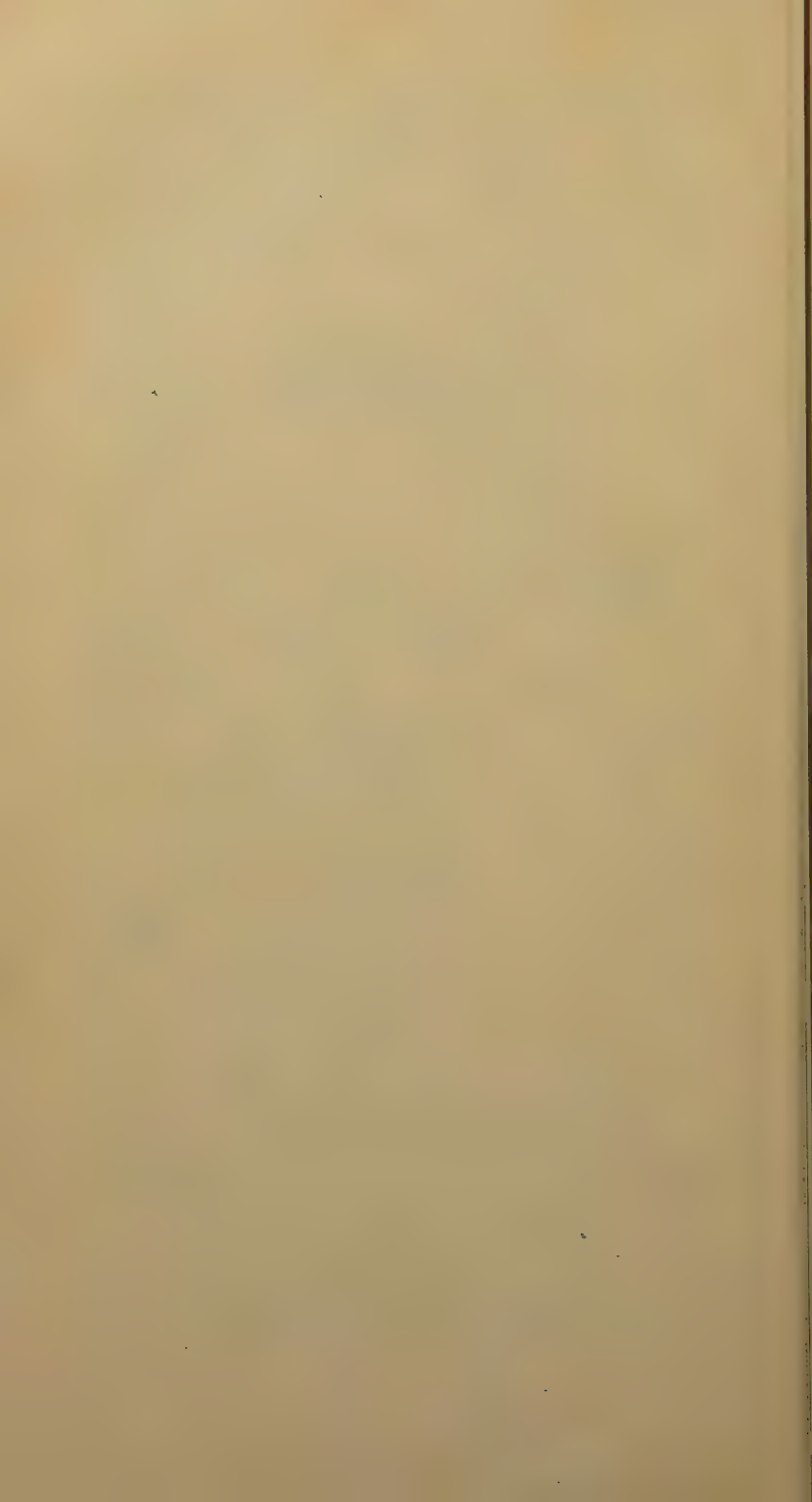
When I visited America
(It is the tedious Old Mandarin speaking)
I was eager to visit the birthplaces
Of Emily Dickinson and Louise Imogen Guiney,
And I found that this people
Had so neglected two of their greatest poets
That they hardly even knew their names.
But I was not peevish nor distraught:
I said to myself
Humanity is everywhere alike—
I myself am but little known in China.

A MOMENT OF MEDITATION

I was told that America was a free country,
But I found many of its substantial citizens
Terrorized by the advertisements
Into believing it was immoral
To wear a straw hat
Later than September 15th.
Wise men know
There is no such thing as a free country—
There never will be.



LITTLE MINDS EVERYWHERE THE SAME



THE OLD MANDARIN

LITTLE MINDS EVERYWHERE
THE SAME

When I walked in America
In my ample robes of a philosopher
Little dogs barked at me
And rude street-boys
Called me Lane Bryant,
Which is, apparently,
The name of an American mandarin.
Even so, when Prominent Americans
Visiting China
Go hurrying about in their tubular trousers
Little dogs bark with anguish.
Thus do petty minds in all lands
Confronted by the unusual
Show their distress.

AN ENIGMA IN THE WOODPILE

An American friend of mine,
A Man in a newspaper office,
Is very wealthy.
He tells me he has an income
Of 10,000 interruptions a year.

HIS EXPERIENCE WITH THE
NEWSPAPERS

When the ship came up the harbour
The New York reporters
Hastened to assail me with questions.
For some curious reason
They were eager for my views
On the Fourth Dimension,
Which was then
(So I heard afterward)
A subject of violent discussion
In the Sunday Magazine Sections.
Rather pleased by their interest in such matters,
I said, in all good faith,

*The Fourth Dimension is Supra-Spatial:
It bears the same relation to Space
That Space does to Flatness.
It may be said to be Continuity,
Or, speaking poetically,
It is the Shadow
That Time casts on Eternity.*

But the high-spirited City Editors,
Finding these modest thoughts of mine

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Insufficiently nimble,

Invented others.

They came out that afternoon with large headlines:

AGED MANDARIN SAYS SHORT SKIRTS

MAKE HIM FEEL YOUNG AGAIN.

ÉRIT ILLE MIHI SEMPER DEUS

I see a lawn
Strewn here and there with little knobs of bone
And chewed billets,
And I feel justified in saying
Somewhere hereabouts
Is a dog.

I see a world
Strewn here and there
With delightful evidences of law—
Geometrical cobwebs, dark blue thunderheads,
The lid of the tea kettle gently chinkling,
Hailstones round and white as camphor-balls—
I say, it looks as though there were a god.

Even if this god is only the binomial theorem,
He is no less a god.

THE HUBBUB OF THE UNIVERSE

Man makes a great fuss
About this planet
Which is only a ball-bearing
In the hub of the universe.
It reminds me
Of the staff of a humorous weekly
Sitting in grave conference
On a two-line joke.

THE OLD MANDARIN

A PATTERN IN THE MUD

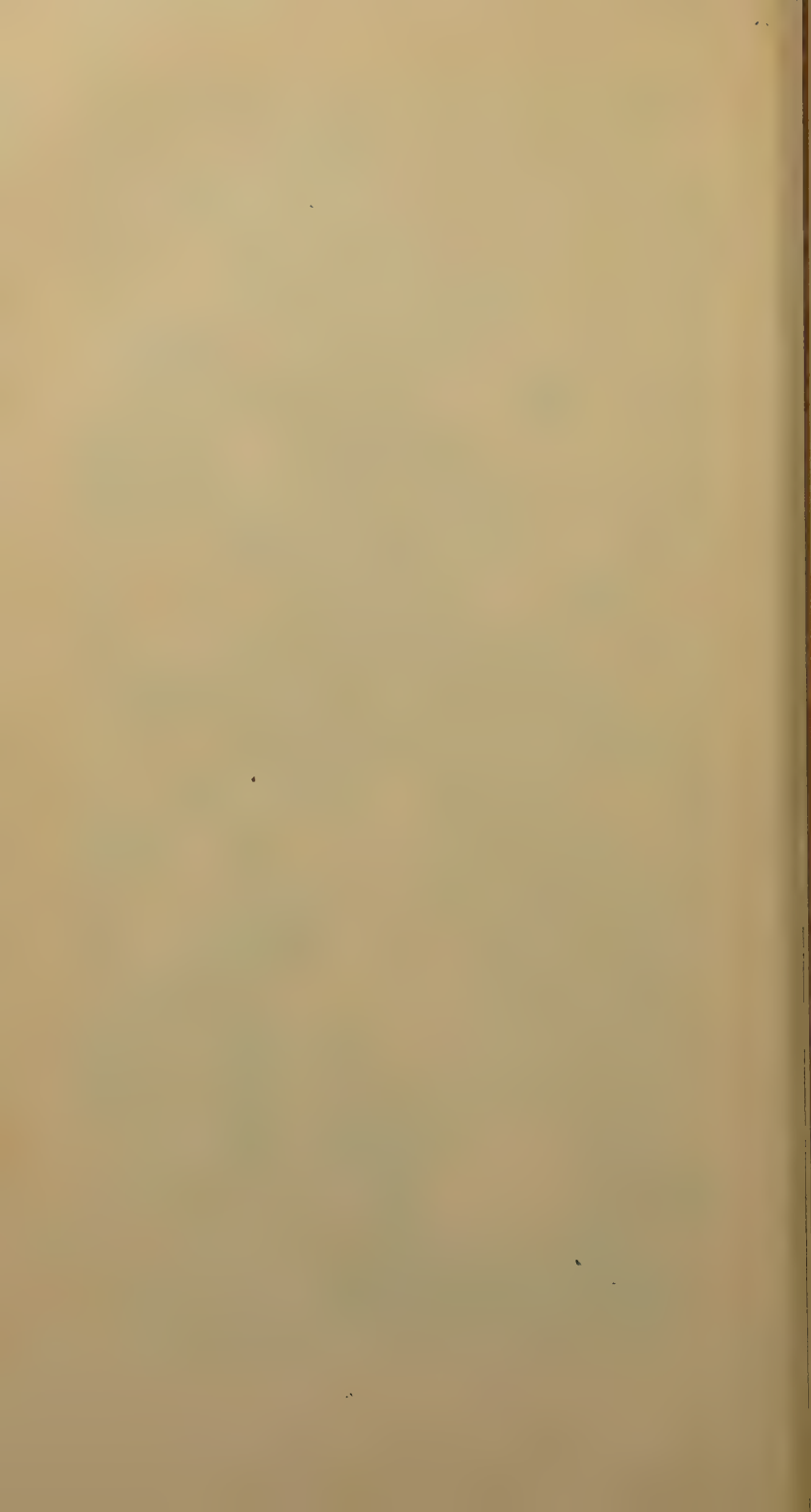
Sometimes, in the slime of a city street,
You will see a clear and lovely pattern
Of little loops and triangles
Imprinted by the tire
Of a motor truck.
Such was the life of No Sho,
The young and tender poet.
The city crushed him,
But he left his runes
In the grime.

THE CIGARETTE STUB

Tossed aside in the uproar
No Sho was quenched;
But in his verses
You will hear a satirical whisper
Like the hiss of a cigarette stub
Cast into a sink.



THE HUBBUB OF THE UNIVERSE



TRAFFIC

Yes, the traffic problem is terrible.

I find it so in my mind, too.

Skipping from the swift shining limousine of an Emotion,

I am spattered by the broad tires of a thundering
Platitude;

Almost nipped by a clangorous ambulance bearing a
swooning Certainty

I barely escape the rumbling trolley of Doubt.

And ever and again,

While my timid soul stands dubiously alert,

The Fire Chief goes chiming up my medulla

In his little red racer.

VOICES IN THE DARK

There are echoes and shoutings in the dark of the night
As menacing, reiterative, calamitous-sounding,
As Extras indistinguishably bawled
In uptown streets at night.

And then the next morning
You learn they meant nothing.

A HUMAN INSTINCT

Youth is conservative,

Youth is the Tory,

Youth is the quencher of bright conflagration!

For whenever I light a match to kindle my pipe of
opium

The young Mandarin and those quaint damsels his
sisters

Competitively cry

O Sire, O Father, O Serene Progenitor,

May I blow it out ?

THE BULB

My mind is like an electric bulb
With a broken filament.
The tremulous fine threads of thought
Waver and waver and waver
And when they meet
There is a little fizzing flash,
And my soul is filled
With a sudden delicate green-blue light.



A HUMAN INSTINCT

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THE OLD MANDARIN

SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN

I was afraid the parson
Would go to law
About that \$490 I owed him.
But I bilked him.
I offered to pay it in seventy instalments
Of seven dollars each,
And he didn't dare
Take the money.

POINT OF VIEW

When Abraham Lincoln was murdered
The thing that interested Matthew Arnold
Was that the assassin
Shouted in Latin
As he leapt on the stage.
This convinced Matthew
There was still hope for America.

NOT NEGOTIABLE

Gold is real money;
Bills are not.
Yet, in nine shops out of ten,
If you offer a gold piece
They are vaguely disturbed:
They would prefer the familiar greenback
And anxiously suspect
They are being diddled.
Observe the fable,
You literary men!

MALADIE DU SIÈCLE

All day long, said the Old Mandarin,
I closed myself in my study, to think;
And all day long
I was aware of the telephone in the next room
Coiled there like a rattlesnake
Ready to strike.



MALADIE DU SIÈCLE

VOICES IN THE FOG

Now returns the season of misty mornings:
From this inland pagoda, before my breakfast,
I hear the boats whistling
In the Gulf of Shi-pa-hoy.
What mellow groaning and musical interchange!
They sound to me like the cries of philosophers
Plaintively feeling their dangerous way
Through the fogs of metaphysical error.
I seem to hear
The soft faint drone of Confucius,
The confident boom of Lord Bacon,
The perplexed rumble of Coleridge,
The hoarse jarring mutter of Schopenhauer,
The clear siren of Santayana,
The shrill hoot of Voltaire!

HIC SUDAVIT SED NON FRUSTRA

The girl in the apartment next door
(After assiduous practice)
Has really mastered one piece on the piano—
A rollicking, meaningless, pseudo-highbrow air,
Full of stolen cadences, synthetic harmony.
And, where the composer was doubtful,
Padded with plenty of bass chords.
Just now I came up in the elevator
With a young man.
He rang the bell of the next apartment
And was friendly welcomed in.
By the time I was in my sitting room
I heard her dashing off her piece
With spontaneous abandon.
O Confucius, O Shakespeare, O Louisa M. Alcott and
Alfred Dunhill,
Will life never pull anything new?

STRATEGY

When, in my youth, I studied the law,
I learned that a skilful advocate
Arranges his argument so that the opposition
Will make just the replies he desires.

Even so in a restaurant
The waiter brings your change
Cunningly composed of quarters
Facilitating
A generous tip.

NO ANSWER

Again and again (said the Old Mandarin)
As I pace my garden walks
My favourite Tonkin spaniel
Hopefully lays a stick at my feet,
Imploring my attention for a game.
Deep in thought, I pay no heed.

Just so, I reflect,
Simple men lay offerings, sacrifices, prayers,
At the altars of their gods,
Gaze wistfully for a sign.
There is no sign:
The gods walk gravely on,
Deep in thought.

Even the collapse of the Woolworth Building
Would not placate the Law of Gravity.

COMPLACENCE

And yet (he continued)
Dogs are not always the emblems of humility.
I have seen men of great pride,
But none who rode this planet
As grotesquely complacent
As a solitary chow
In the rear of a limousine.

PRAGMATISM

When Chancellor Mu Kow and I were ennuyés
We used to go to the windy hill
And fly paper kites.
“Have you considered, Tremendous One”
(I asked him),
“The paradox of a kite?
To make it soar steadily
You must weight it down with a tail;
And to keep the spirit lofty, it is well . . .”
—“Do not, I beg you”
(Replied the Great Magistrate),
“Unsettle me with analogies.
You have only to meditate and watch the goldfish,
I must govern a province.”

BURLESQUE SHOW

Curious how often you see a man
Who seems a blemished caricature of some other person.
There is a coolie
Who cleanses my fishponds:
He looks exactly like the faintly degraded replica
Of my friend the Chancellor—
With all his Excellency's keenness, wit, and assurance
Blurred and rubbed out.
Nature, to be sure,
Is the great Burlesquer.

WEAKNESS

If you approach me
I shall cheerfully promise
More than I can perform:
For I have my frailties.

But withinward, my soul
Evades, eludes, recedes;
And you must not be peevish—
I have my own secrets to pursue.
And so have you.

THE OLD MANDARIN

TESTAMENT OF NO SHO

Prithee (cried No Sho, the young poet)
Shut out the baby:
Don't let her come into my thinking-room.
She is a darling
And her every movement is a loveliness;
But how can I afford to look at her—
I, who already have notes for hundreds more poems
That I can ever write.

For I have had moments
When every form and colour of life
Seemed bursting with naked poetry—
Broadway for the taxis,
Columbus for the L,
But Amsterdam's the Avenue
Where trucks go down like hell—

And there are so many lovely poems being written
I am amazed:
For how do the darling poets find time and chance to
live them,
Those moments of millennium

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

When the mind ignites the hand?
But for this was I born
And for this came I into the world
To blow from the slippery suds of life
My bubbles of fragile glee.

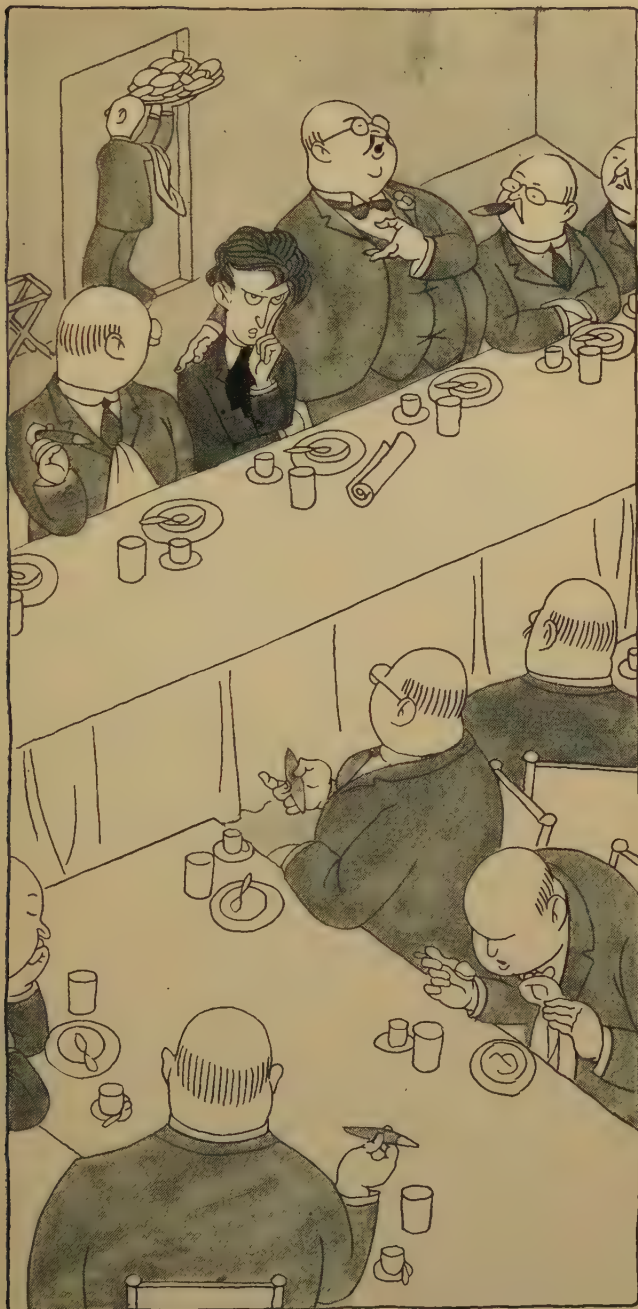
THE OLD MANDARIN

CONTRADICTION

I saw a man about to write a poem:
He trod ruthlessly down a subway car,
Leaving behind him, left and right,
Macerated corns
And anguished faces.
Twenty minutes later
He wrote a lyric
Of exquisite tenderness.

EXEMPT

In a subway car
I saw a girl reading the *New Republic*.
Her long dark lashes
Were bent above an article
Called "The Surplus Woman."
She was temptingly beautiful
And she smiled upon the text
With gentle assurance and security.



MEDITATIONS ON POETRY



THE OLD MANDARIN

MEDITATIONS ON POETRY

Poets seem to be much in demand.
Drawing room evenings, women's club meetings,
Literary luncheons, Chamber of Commerce dinners,
Wherever two or three sandwiches are gathered together
There is always a poet
Exchanging his "message"
For an equivalent bulk
Of chicken chow mein
And jellied sharks' fins.
All this is proof
Of a widespread hunger,
And not merely on the part of the poet.

A PRAGMATIST

The American poet Lindsay
(A mercurial fellow)
Began his career
By codifying the ways in which a poet
Can get a free meal.
Here was a seer!
Here was a man with strong grasp of essentials!

A HAPPY LIFE

The American poet Whitman
Did little to assist the razor industry,
But he erected a plausible philosophy
Of indolence
Which, without soft concealments,
He called *Loafing*.
This so irritated the American people
(Who were busy putting up buildings
And tearing them down again)
That they never forgave him.
He was deficient in humour,
But he had a good time.

A NATIONAL FRAILTY

The American people
Were put into the world
To assist foreign lecturers.
When I visited them
They filled crowded halls
To hear me tell them Great Truths
Which they might as well have read
In their own prophet Thoreau.
They paid me, for this,
Three hundred dollars a night,
And ten of their mandarins
Invited me to visit at Newport.
My agent told me
If I would wear Chinese costume on the platform
It would be five hundred.

THE MAN WITH THE RAKE

It is queer to think that many people
Have never raked leaves.
On a brilliant Sunday morning in October
I admired trees as ruddy as burnt orange,
Trees as pale and clear as Sauterne.
Raking placidly
I enjoyed the crisp rustle.

That is what I like about raking leaves—
It is wine and opiate for the mind:
The incessant skirmish of the wits is calmed,
And as you rake and burn
And dodge, with smarting eyes,
The pungent, veering reek,
You fall into a dull easy muse,
And think to yourself,
After all, what is writing books
But raking leaves?

And at such times
I plant the seeds of poems.
It takes poems a long while to grow—
They lie germinating in the dark of the mind;
But next spring, very likely,
There may emerge the green and tender shoots
Of two or three bright stanzas.

VERITAS VOS DAMNABIT

It is the mark of extreme youth
To believe that telling the Whole Truth
Is always useful.
Truth is not a diet
But a condiment.

THE OLD MANDARIN

ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT

Once, on a midnight of rain and gale,
When the windows rattled in the hollow darkness,
I was in the kitchen
Eating cold turkey and cranberry sauce
Frisked from the icebox.
My mind was clear and busy:
Then, I suppose, I came as near as I ever shall
To being ready to write a great poem. . . .
But I lay down on my couch to meditate
And was soon fast asleep.

ADVANTAGE OF A BOOKISH
UPBRINGING

When the wine has done its rosy deed
(As the reputable English poet said)
I enjoy to study in tranquillity
The lovable absurdities of men.
And then my familiarity with literatures
Besteads me well,
Affording me always a scholarly explanation
For conduct seemingly eccentric.

Once, I remember,
After an evening in which Chancellor Mu Kow and
myself
Had repeatedly toasted the loveliness of the moon.
Condoling her solitude
In the wide pale sky,
I lay in a perfection of comfortable thought
In a gently revolving cabbage field.
But my wife's parents
Heading the search party
Discovered me there, and cried lamentation and oxy-
tones.
Be of good cheer, I said:
It is with me as with the great Flaubert



ANOTHER POSTPONEMENT



THE OLD MANDARIN

Who pernoctated in a cabbage patch
Noting down, for purpose of literature,
The tincture of moonshine
On the leaves of the vegetables.
Even so, I sacrifice myself for realism.
Tenderly they carried me in.

$$(a + b)^2$$

Marriage is the square of a plus b

In other words

$$a^2 + b^2 + 2ab$$

Where $2ab$ (of course)

Are twins.

SECRET THOUGHTS

And while my visitor prattled
I courteously nodded;
My eye was fast upon him,
My face bright with attention;
But inwardly I was saying:
"The excellent fellow, why does he tell me all this?
What has this to do with me?
O Buddha, when will he depart?"

IRRITATION OF THE OLD MANDARIN

There was another reporter
(A young woman, this time)
Who came to my hotel to ask whether
The Fine Art of Self-Salesmanship
Had made much progress in China?
I said, "Dear young Madam,
As regards ladies, our language has for that Fine Art
An ugly word.
As regards Aggressive Business Men
I can only say,
Caveat Emptor."

BIVALVES

The pearl
Is a disease of the oyster.
A poem
Is a disease of the spirit
Caused by the irritation
Of a granule of Truth
Fallen into that soft gray bivalve
We call the mind.

ETERNITY AND THE TOOTH

In regard to Eternity (said the Old Mandarin)
I feel about it as I do about one of my teeth.
Every now and then it gives me
A devil of a twinge,
And for a while
I groan and can think of naught else.
Then the anguish abates and I dismiss it from my mind.
But I know, just the same,
That some day
I've got to go through with it.

A PROVERB

We have a saying in China
That a man will wash his hands cleaner for visitors
Than he will for the family.
Even so,
He who is full of sententious wisdom in public
May be dark and doubtful within.

THE TOLERATOR

From time to time
I have laid my heart bare before you
And you did not like it.
So I must point out to you
It is *my* heart, not yours.

My wrongness, perhaps,
Is dearer to me
Than your rightness.
Yet you must not think
That when I disagree with you
I dislike you.
On the contrary:
I love you for having ideas of your own.
I know how you came to have those ideas,
And they are precious to you.

THE PAINTER

I talked with a young painter,
And as we came along Beekman Street
My eye dwelt upon the shining audacity
Of the Woolworth Building.
But he was peering downward along the curb
Where were clear pools of melted snow.
"See!" he cried,
"That's how it ought to be painted!"
There, reflected in a long panel of water,
Sharp and exquisite, was the pale tower—
Enriching every puddle in the neighbourhood.

True! I said—
Beauty is like the Medusa:
Look her in the face, and you run mad;
But, like Perseus,
Study her reflection in the polished shield.
Look upon life in the mirror of some art
And, perhaps, you will stay sane.

THE POET

I talked with a poet
Who had just cashed a royalty check.
"In the last six months," he boasted,
"They sold thirty copies.
I tell you, it warms the cockles
Of my right-hand trouser."

THE OLD MANDARIN

VARIATIONS ON BUDDHIST
SAPPHICS

If it should happen in somebody's office
That you were offered a noggin of cognac
And had to drink it in a cup of cardboard,

You would not dare to degust it leisurely:
You must drink fast, before the vivid essence
Ate through the seam of the chaste little vesicle.

So if we purpose, my frolicsome people,
To pour great poetry in the crimped paper
Sterilized lilycups of daily behaviour,
Series of neat little days from containers,
Caulk them with paraffin—

Or drink in a hurry.

ADJUSTMENT

In your Great City
I see, in jewellers' windows,
Clocks that tell the guaranteed Correct Time;
And in front of those clocks people always halted
Adjusting their watches.
But suppose there were displayed, beside the street,
Some great poem,
Telling perfect Truth or Beauty,
How many passengers
Would pause to adjust their minds?



ADJUSTMENT

THE OLD MANDARIN

THE SURF

We took the baby
(Three years old)
To the beach at Lloyd's Neck.
A cold northern day and the wind was crisping surf on
the beach.
She looked at the white foam
And heard its rhyming prosody.
"Snow," she announced.
"Snow saying, Sorrow to come in,
Sorrow to come in."

ANTICRASTINATION

On my way to your theatres, said the dubious Old Mandarin,

I see To-morrow's papers already on sale
At eight o'clock To-night.

So does your strange mad city
Leap hotly towards the Future,
Tossing aside each Day before it is finished,
Hungriely, fatuously, craving the next.

Is it possible that the Editor
Is dissatisfied with each and every of his irreplaceable
To-days

That he hurries To-morrow so close upon its heels?

THE OLD MANDARIN

SUGGESTION

For Dancing and Dining, said the Old Mandarin,
I like to go to that chophouse
Where the couples, circling merrily,
Continually pass a sign,
Posted beside the dancing floor:
EXQUISITE VEGETABLE DINNER.
It seems, he said,
To make carnal thoughts impossible.

PROGRAMME NOTE FOR
A COSMIC MELODRAMA

The creator requests the audience
Not to divulge the solution
Of the mystery on which the action is founded.
Future patrons
Will more greatly relish the dénouement
If kept in suspense
Till the final curtain.

THOUGHTS IN THE GULF STREAM

Who has described the wave
Crisping oblique from *Caronia's* bow
In clear summer midnight?
Brighter than snow the crumble, the running curling
 crumble
Flung by her wedgy stem:
Then a hollow, a lovely bending hollow,
Which swells up to a spread, an outward comb of
 breaker
Drawing veins and stripings
After it through the black:
And the little phosphor-sparkle,
The seethe along her side,
All this has never been properly described
Because no passenger ever sees it
With detached and watchful mind.
None of them
In clear summer midnight
Ever sees it alone.

ANXIETY

It worries me
To hear people cough late at night
For then I know they are lying awake
And probably thinking
And it troubles me to think about people thinking
Alone, in bed, at night.

THE OLD MANDARIN

NONE OF MY BUSINESS

I saw a satisfied bee
Blissfully asleep in a hollyhock flower.
I tickled him with a straw
To see if he would wake,
And then I was ashamed
Realizing how gravely I had been infected
By your American passion for interfering
In other people's affairs.
No harm was done, however—
He only grumbled affectionately
And turned over on the other side.

DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT

It is certainly true

(Admitted the Old Mandarin)

That a great proportion of meritorious poetry

Was inspired by beautiful women,

But it would never have been actually written

Without black coffee.

THE OLD MANDARIN

MATIN AU LUXEMBOURG

Oh Medici Fountain,
Sombre in your aisle of leaves, where confused shadow
Aggravates young artists;
Where Sorbonne students read intermittently
And trysting lovers
Sorrow about many things—
In your dusky basin the Parisian sparrows
More hygienic than most natives of the Quarter
Begin the day with a bath.

HOURS OF AFFLUENCE

And in the Metro—the Paris subway—

They have the prettiest verbal nicety:

They call Rush Hours

Les Heures d'Affluence.

THE OLD MANDARIN

ANXIETIES OF A PURSER

Never let a glass keep ringing
Is a sea superstition.
A tumbler, accidentally tingled so that it chimes
Must be stilled at once, or it means bad fortune.
Evenings in the old *Echolalia*
How we used to keep our host, the purser, leaping from
 side to side,
By surreptitiously ticking our glasses.
There was only one way for him to avert ill omen—
Keeping our goblets full.

A LITTLE SICKNESS

At the back of the flower-bed
I find a washed-out flake of cardboard—
An imitation daffodil.
And I remember, with a little sickness in my heart,
That when the children
Had gaily picked most of those new trembles of April
I bade them fabricate facsimile daffodils
With cardboard and crayon
And stick them in the ground in place of the ravished
ones.
I wanted them to learn that beauty
Once plucked up, can't quite be replaced.
"Old enough to know better," I told them sternly—
Ah, poor fool,
As though anyone ever was!

TO C. H. P.

Cross-legged in pyjamas on the floor at one A. M.
Under an electric light
I was enjoying some Japanese poetry.
Suddenly the light went out:
Through the tracery of the oak tree
I saw the old moon rising,
One burning star balanced in a cool chink,
Heard the steady thrill of the crickets—
A hokku, a very hokku!
There, unguessed and unregarded
Had been the perfect essence of what I was admiring
In mere paper and ink.
This is very important, I said,
As I stared at the fragile night.
The bulb went out on purpose to teach me
Not to take the translation for the original.

THE NEW MOON FEELING

How is it, by what incalculable instinct,
That now and then, in a clean afternoon,
By some touch of air or slope of twilight,
Without previous thought I say to myself
(And am unerringly right)
It feels as if
There were a New Moon.

THE OLD MANDARIN

CAVE CANEM

Taking my evening stroll
I cautiously keep to the woodland alley
Turning back before reaching the neighbours' houses
To avoid startling any of the dogs.
It might be well, I ponder,
If one could do thus in the mind also,
Warily retracing one's thoughts
Before arousing the outcry
Of some indignant hound.

MEDITATION ON THE HEARTH

A householder who has once
Had a fire in the chimney
Will perhaps be careful
Before he again puts a match
To a bundle of excelsior.

THE OLD MANDARIN

VIGILIAE ALBAE

Now I am silent and my name is Tacitus.
But in this douce brightness
I have to pause now and then
Putting the moon behind the pine tree
To give myself respite
From her cruel and insinuating lustre.
O moon, scratch-pad of poets,
More meant against than meaning!

TICK DOULOUREUX

I am wounded
In a fatal artery.
The vein of Time is cut,
The minutes are bleeding, bleeding away.
Bartender, make me a tourniquet for this hemorrhage
Or I shall tick to death.

DEATH OF A JOURNALIST

Midway of this mortal life, the fellow
Met something he had never known before—
A region, very wide and deep, of Silence.

His notion was, at first, to write a sonnet:
Sonnet in Praise of Silence.

Yes, you smile,
But he smiled first. He didn't finish it:
He only wrote eight lines. Oh well, perhaps
That's the finest tribute I can pay him.



NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS



NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE [1920]

IT IS with some reluctance that I accede to the publisher's entreaties to put these translations before the world of polite letters. I am painfully aware that my knowledge of Chinese is rather rudimentary, based as it is largely on laundry slips. I cannot help having a suspicion that there are a good many of the 40,000 ideographs with which I am not sufficiently familiar. But my readers will sympathize when they realize the difficulties of the task which I have set myself. It is disconcerting, when spending an evening translating the pearly and beautifully scalloped epigrams of No Sho or Mu Kow or Po Lil Chile, to find that the character which I thought (by comparison with my codex of laundry slips) must mean *a pair of pyjamas*, would, if so translated, give a regrettably intimate and informal tone to the verse. It is true that relying entirely on this laundry slip glossary somewhat restricts the scope of my translation; and therefore I have not scrupled to do as other devotees of Chinese verse, and when in doubt as to the exact meaning of a phrase I have always translated it *a bowl of jade filled with the milk of the moonlight*.

Most interesting of all, it will be agreed, is the fact

that the translations establish beyond cavil that the authors of these poems are men very much like ourselves. Most of the Chinese poetry that has been translated is of a querulous or bibbing sort: it gives an unfair picture of a high-spirited and proud race, representing them as eternally moaning about maidens with finger-nails shaped like filberts, lotus leaves in the moonshine, and death by excess of wine. The Chinese poets I here introduce have not been taken up by the poetical coteries, because they are of the more satiric sort; they are the humorists of China. No Sho, for example, was a sort of private columnist to an eminent mandarin of the P'un dynasty. It was his duty to write, every day, a number of paragraphs, epigrams, wheezes, and ditties, and bring them in the afternoon to his patron's tea-house. Here he would read them aloud to the mandarin and his guests as they sat at their wine and watermelon seeds. After each item was read, there would be a little music on the Chinese zither, and the assembled company would discuss the possibility of No Sho's work being taken up by the Women's Clubs of America. One day, however, in a fit of pique because the audience did not sufficiently applaud one of his apothegms, No Sho leaped out of the tea-house into the lake. He did not really intend to destroy himself, but only to give his employer a fright, thinking thereby to get his salary raised; but the water lilies (which are so frequently described in Chinese poetry) were very thick in that pond, their stems got entwined round his neck, and he perished. It was obvious that his death was not suicide, for he had



PORTRAIT OF NO-SHO

carefully laid his manuscripts on a bench before jumping and after the excitement (and the poet) had subsided it was found that among the papers was a stamped addressed envelope directed to Lady Editor, Well Known Pottry Magazine, Chicago. In spite of the utmost efforts of the Postmaster General it was not possible to find out who was meant by this; and No Sho's manuscripts were at last sold by the Dead Letter Office; in which way they came to my hands.

Any proceeds from the sale of these translations will be applied to increasing and codifying my collection of laundry slips.

THE TRANSLATOR.

RECIPROCATION

One good nocturne
Deserves another,
Said George Sand
When she met Chopin.

AN EJACULATION

Genius, cried the commuter,
As he ran for the 8:13,
Consists of an infinite capacity
For catching trains.

PANORAMA OF A HAPPY EVENING

SIX O'CLOCK

When the frogs clear their throats
Like old club members,
And the fireflies
Punctuate the dusk with a network of brightness,
Hasten, boy, to His Excellency Mu Kow,
And ask him to join me
In a trifling merriment.
And be careful
To stretch two white ropes
Along the path,
Lest, when His Excellency totters homeward in the
darkness,
He fall in the canal.

EIGHT O'CLOCK

Welcome, Excellency, welcome!
You do me too much honour!
Lay aside your robe and we will sit in the pagoda.
Throw your lip over these pickled sharks' fins.
I pray you, be at your ease:
Let this evening be conducted on a high philosophical
plane.



PANORAMĀ OF A HAPPY EVENING

NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

The great Confucius, as you were saying, put it neatly:
*Prohibition cannot harm me,
I have wined to-day.*

NINE O'CLOCK

Yes, Excellency, you have said it:
We live but once.
Boy! Some more of those curried snails!
How warm this moonlight is.
By all means, Excellency, take off your shirt
If you will be more comfortable.

TEN O'CLOCK

Admirable, admirable!
To speak sooth, Excellency, I had no idea
That you could do the Shan-Tung saraband with such
spirit.
But—you will pardon me for mentioning it—
Let me clear away the broken glassware
Before you dance barefoot on the table.
The Emperor would never forgive me
If you should wound yourself—
Yes, I can see you perfectly from here.
It is very comfortable here, under the table.

ELEVEN O'CLOCK

Boy, boy! Make haste!
I *begged* His Excellency to tread with care.

TRANSLATIONS FROM THE CHINESE

Woe is me! His Excellency insisted on catching a cool-
slippery eel

To lay against his heated forehead.

Hasten, boy, hasten!

His Excellency

Has fallen into the canal.

PRUDENCE

Help! Mad dog! cried someone.

I hastened swiftly

In the opposite direction.

Wisdom, I murmured,

Is better than rabies.

SAFE AND SANE

My theology, briefly,
Is that the Universe
Was Dictated
But not Signed.

NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

LEGES SINE MORIBUS VANAE

The Ten Commandments
Are not really commandments,
But they are valuable
Suggestions.

A BURNING BOSOM

Sitting in this tea-house,
Looking out on the clear cool water
And the silver lilies,
How I wish I could press a dripping lily-pad
On my burning bosom
To ease me of my smart.
A broken heart, you ask, Mar Quong?
No, no, a mustard plaster.

INGRATITUDE

Bearing Walt Whitman in mind,
I intend to say
On my deathbed:
"I regard my poems as
My *carte de visite*
To posterity."
It is sad to have to add
That posterity will reply
"Not at home."

SILHOUETTE OF A HUSBAND

Ladies classify husbands
Into two classes:
Those who are "attentive,"
And those who are not.
I fear I am of the latter,
For I never can remember
My home telephone number.
But my friend Chang Jo
Always knows his home number.
He calls up so often to say
"My dear,
I will not be home to dinner this evening."

CONFESSION

Whenever I meet a handsome man
I have an irresistible impulse
To look at the nearest mirror.
The most satisfying form of art
Is contrast.

HANDICAPPED

Life is a game of whist
Between Man and Nature
In which Nature knows all Man's cards.
Well, suppose I try you out on trumps,
Says Nature,
Leading the mating instinct.

THE CODE

Those fireflies sparkling in the willows,
Here, there, here, there;
Those frogs piping in the moonlit pond,
Tweedle, tweedle, tweedle—
There seems to be a persistent method in it.
What is the code?
Is Nature trying to get across some message to me?

THE POINT OF VIEW

When the birch tree was cut down
The birds came and sat on the trunk
And gossiped.
In this tree I found the largest caterpillar I ever ate,
Said the robin.
In this tree I met my first wife,
Said the wren.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT

One of the penalties
Of being a human being
Is
Other human beings

ADVICE

Never try to tell people anything
Unless
They know it already.
Even then,
It is well to refrain.

WHILE IN THE MOOD

If there is any kind of poetry
I haven't written,
You might tell me about it,
And I'll do some.

TO THE BROWNING SOCIETY OF
SHANGHAI

Be cruel to poets, and don't let them think
You like their preposterous patterns in ink;
For poets write better when not overfed:
The time to praise poets is after they're dead.

POETS EASILY CONSOLED

The anguishes of poets are
Less grim than other men's, by far:
When other men can only curse,
The poet puts his woes in verse.
And Yee Lee, though at first the pang was smart
When by his friend Wu Wu his bride was stolen,
Soon asked which best expressed a broken heart,
A dash, a comma, or a semi-colon?

AN ARISTOCRAT OF THE P'UN
DYNASTY

Just as the beheading was all ready to begin,
"What was *your* offence?" they asked the ancient
mandarin.

The mandarin smiled grimly, as on his knees he sank.
"My offence?" he whispered: "Ah, my offence is
—rank."

THE ASTRONOMER TO HIS MISTRESS

Thou art my earth, and I thy moon,
In orbit ever true to thee:
O grant thy planet may come soon
To his ecstatic perigee.

AUTUMN COLOURS

How tedious it seems, and strange,
That poets should be raving still
Of autumn tints: it's just the change
From chlorophyll to xanthophyll.



REFLECTION

REFLECTION

Women use shop windows to look through,
Admiring the goods displayed.
Men use them to look at,
Finding them agreeable
As mirrors.

THOUGHT ON CONVERSING WITH A
PROMINENT STATESMAN

It is all right for a man
To be absent-minded,
But his mind shouldn't overstay
Its leave of absence.

QUERY

Who can alleviate
The joy of a social worker
Alleviating
The sorrows of the poor?

THE POWER HOUSE*

Every day I go past
The power house on Ludlow Street.
I look into the open windows
And see the great dynamos on their shelves.
They have power enough
To jazz the earth
And throw the planets out of step,
But they make no sound.
I saw a girl with shell goggles
Dusting some of them, unterrified
By her proximity
To such dangerous engines.
Look out, child, *look out!*
Don't get too near the Bernard Shaw circuit-breaker
Or the Walt Whitman flywheel!

*The Chinese poet refers here, in his oblique fashion, to the Mercantile Library in Philadelphia.—THE TRANSLATOR.

ON A PAIR OF SPATS LAID AWAY
FOR THE SUMMER

Little spats,
Down among the summer mothballs
Do you hanker for the time
When you will once more
Encase her bright ankles
As they glimmer up and down
Chestnut Street?
Your gain will be our loss,
But don't be dogs in the manger,
Little spats!

THIS INCONSTANCY IS SUCH

Chestnut Street is dark and gloomy 11:30 P. M.
But from an upper window
Comes the insane ecstasy of jazz.
Cling-cling of little bells,
Rattle of drums,
Tick-tock of the gourds,
Crash of cymbals,
Wail of violins on the placid night.
Life is tragic;
Life is damnable;
But I do a little scamper of my own
There on the pavement.

MISDIRECTED ZEAL

When I am at work in the office
A kind of palsy seizes on my soul.
I feel the whole weight of the universe
Crushing down on my defenseless spirit;
But when I get home at night
And it is time to go to bed,
I am as brisk as a ticket seller
In the box office of a vaudeville show.
In the sheer lustihood of my exuberance
I rearrange all the bottles in the medicine closet,
And with the zeal of Russell Conwell
Delivering "Acres of Diamonds" for the 5000th time,
I have been known to pursue a cockroach
From one end of the apartment to the other.

ON WATCHING HIS STENOGRAPHER

If only the mechanism of society
Were as simple as a typewriter,
And the management of affairs
Could be transposed
From Capital to Lower Case
By pressing a shift key!



MISDIRECTED ZEAL



A PLACID DISPOSITION

I can always keep my temper
When I'm alone.
It's only other folks
That rile me.

A DISCOVERY

The worst moment
In my life
Is when I am cleaning up the cellar
And find my magenta tie,
Three frayed soft collars,
And the dear old brown pair of trousers
In the trash-box
Where my wife put them.

NO SHO AND HIS FRIENDS

BREAKING THE RULES

I know a merchant
Who is an offence to all Rotarians,
He began business on a shoestring,
And yet he is not successful.

THOUGHTS OF A MIDDLE-AGED
MANDARIN

Breaking in a new idea
Is like breaking in a new pipe:
Uncomfortable work.
I like the old familiar thoughts,
No bite or parch.



A DISCOVERY



BUDDHIST LULLABY

My mind is an apartment.
When it is all dark,
And I am about to sleep,
Who is that walking
On the floor overhead?

THE REELING BRAIN

My mind is a movie film.
Who the camera man was,
I don't know,
But he certainly shot
Some queer pictures.
I always fear
That some day the film will snap
And the audience
Will applaud ironically.

CONFUCIUS CONFUSED

I've been taking dictation
From the universe
For quite a while.
I've got a bunch of notes:
Now it's time to transcribe them.
Queer—
I can't seem
To make sense out of them.

CAUTION

My mind needs no fire escape.
It is equipped with automatic sprinklers.
As soon as an idea catches fire
They put it out.
I am heavily insured against
Inflammatory notions.

STEAM SHOVEL NEEDED

My mind is like the Panama Canal.
Great ocean-going ideas
Lie moored in the locks
Until my thought rises to the level
Where they can proceed.
Every now and then
There is a brainslide in the Culebra Cut
And all traffic is halted.

UNEASINESS

Sometimes when I am writing poetry
I have an uncomfortable feeling
That I am about to be
Interrupted
By a flash of prose.

PESSIMISM

I always ask
At least three trainmen
If this is the right train for where I am going.
Even then,
I hardly believe them.

LACK OF BALANCE

The Prune Exchange Bank
Refused my account
Because I tried to deposit
A dew-spangled cobweb
And a post-dated sunset.

ANNOUNCEMENT

My mind is closed pending repairs.
After alterations are completed,
Will reopen in these premises
With a large line of plain and fancy goods.

*Here Ends This Complete Codex of Translations
from the Chinese, Scrupulously Deciphered
by Christopher Morley from the original
cordiscript, and published by Double-
day, Page & Company in the
year of Grace 1927. And
both publisher and
author invoke hand-
some generous
blessing upon
anyone who
actually
buys
it.*





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